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ABSTRACT

In this two-part paper, an attempt is made to examine the relationship between social contexts and effective schools and specifically to contribute to the development of a conceptual model for understanding how social contexts influence the operation of effective schools and student learning. In the first part, school effects research is drawn upon in order to elaborate upon a model developed by John Carroll (1963) at Teachers College. In the second part, the focus is on one set of relationships within Carroll's model in an attempt to broaden understanding of how social contexts influence the operation of instructionally effective schools. Research suggests that schools can become effective without parent involvement, yet parent involvement and expectations seem to have potentially powerful effects on student learning. It also raises the following question for future investigation: What combinations of effectiveness factors appear to enhance instructional effectiveness given varying social contexts? It is recommended that future studies examine both the source of expectations and the manner in which schools translate and communicate expectations to students. In particular, researchers should examine the principal's role in linking the school and the community. Contingency theories of organizational leadership may provide guidance in comceptualizing the dynamics between organizational context and effective instructional leadership behavior. (JAM)

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Social Context Effects on School Effects

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington D.C., April 1987

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SOCIAL CONTEXT EFFECTS ON SCHOOL EFFECTS

The effects of family background on student learning are powerful and long lasting. Studies of school social contexts consistently indicate that social class influences the educational beliefs, preferences, and expectations of parents, school staff, and students (Coleman et al.,, 1966; Hills, 1961; McDill et. al., 1969; Teddlie et al., 1985; Wayson, 1966). The conclusion of Coleman and his colleagues (1966) that student socioeconomic status (SES) is a powerful predictor of student achievement has been substantiated in other studies that have employed an educational production function approach (for comprehensive reviews see Averch et al., 1974; Bridge, Judd, & Moock 1979). The home environment exerts a strong and persisting influence on student learning both as a consequence of the material resources it offers and the expectations that shape the child's attitudes and beliefs about learning.

Studies of instructionally effective schools have elaborated on the earlier production function research by identifying factors associated with student learning beyond the effects of family background. This body of research suggests that effective schools for low SES students communicate the belief that all students can and will attain minimum mastery of basic academic skills (Brookover et al., 1975, 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Rutter et al., 1979); Venezky & Winfield, 1979).

Although effective schools policy and practice has been legitimated among policy makers, two characteristics of the effective schools research continue to impede our understanding and application of this research base. The first characteristic concerns the general absence

of a theoretical framework for conceptualizing how effective schools promote student learning. Thus, most effective schools studies infer relationships from findings without benefit of an underlying model of school learning.

The second limiting characteristic of the effective schools research is the narrow focus on schools serving the urban poor. The choice to study low SES, primarily urban, schools reflects the equity concerns expressed by practitioners and researchers in response to Coleman's conclusion that "schools don't make a difference" (Coleman et al., 1966). The focus on low SES schools does, however, limit the ability of policy makers and practitioners to apply the effective schools findings to schools across the full range of social contexts. Thus, researchers must address the problem of generalizing findings from studies of low SES schools to other social contexts.

In this paper a modest attempt is made to examine the relationship between social contexts and effective schools. Although we frequently refer to empirical findings in this paper, our central purpose is to contribute to the development of a conceptual model for understanding how social contexts influence the operation of effective schools and student learning. In the first part, we draw upon the school effects research to elaborate upon a model of school learning developed by John Carroll (1963) at Teachers College. The model presented here is not represented as a finished product. In the second part of the paper we focus on one set of relationships within this model in an attempt to broaden our understanding of how social contexts influence the operation of instructionally effective schools.

A Model of School Learning

A noteworthy attempt to develop a model of school learning was conducted by John Carroll (1963) at Teachers College during the 1960's. Carroll's model has been further developed by Block (1971, 1974), Bloom (1976), and Levin (1978). Carroll's model attempts to explain the process of school learning through the interaction of five components, three relating to individual learner conditions and two pertaining to school/classroom learning conditions. The student related factors include:

1) student aptitude which is defined as "the amount of time needed to learn the task under optimal instructional conditions.";
2) student ability to understand instruction;
3) student perseverance, which is ".... the amount of time the learner is willing to actively engage in learning."

Factors external to the student are:

4) time allowed for learning;
5) quality of instruction which is viewed as a measure of the degree to which instruction enables a student to master a task in the shortest amount of time consonant with his aptitude (Carroll, 1963).

Levin (1978) used this model as the basis for examining the relationship between teacher inputs and student learning. Thus, he focused primarily upon the manner in which teacher characteristics influence time for learning and the quality of instruction. In this paper we broaden that focus to include the relationship among selected characteristics of students, practices associated with effective schools, and school social context.

Carroll's model provides an excellent starting point for

considering the relationships among social context, school organization, student characteristics, and student learning. The model includes two school related factors: time for learning and quality of instruction. These represent the building blocks for developing student mastery of cognitive skills. Research on effective teaching and schooling has made significant progress since the 1960's in describing how school organization and instructional practices promote student learning. This research has identified characteristics of effective classroom and school programs for low SES students including: clear school mission, high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, instructional leadership, curriculum alignment, active instruction, and student opportunity to learn (for research reviews that define and describe these effective schools factors in detail see Bossert et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1982; Murphy, et al., 1984; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Carroll's two school related variables -- time for learning and quality of instruction -- are subsumed within student opportunity to learn, curricular alignment, active instruction, and frequent monitoring of student progress. These effective school factors provide a framework for describing operationally how teachers and principals support student efforts to learn.

In addition, findings from the effective schools studies address the other portion of Carroll's model related to the individual learner, particularly to student perseverance. These studies suggest that the expectations for student achievement held by parents, the principal, teachers, and the student profoundly influence learning outcomes. Especially worthy of note is the work of Brookover and his

colleagues (1975, 1978, 1979) in operationalizing the concept of expectations. They define expectations in two related terms: self-concept of academic ability and student sense of academic efficacy. Self-concept of academic ability refers to the belief that one is capable of academic mastery. A sense of academic efficacy refers to the belief that one's efforts can make a difference in school. Brookover and his colleagues found that the achievement of students in effective schools serving the urban poor was associated both with greater sense of student self-concept of academic ability and sense of academic efficacy (Brookover et al., 1978).

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions regarding the powerful influence of expectations on student learning (Brophy & Good, 1986; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Rosenthal, 1968; Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie et al., 1985). The probability that a student will attain minimum academic mastery tends to increase when adults expect the student will learn. Such an expectation shapes both adult and student behaviors. Adults act in ways that reinforce student success. Students appear more willing to actively engage in their work, devoting greater effort and more time to their studies. In an earlier paper, we developed a model of "academic press" to describe the process by which staff expectations influence school/classroom practices and student self-expectations. Thus, we view expectations for student learning as having an interactive relationship with student perseverance. This model is displayed in Figure 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Expectations can be conceptualized both as an individual learner condition (e.g., student sense of academic efficacy) and as a school/classroom organization factor (e.g., teacher expectations as communicated through questioning techniques or school expectations as communicated through curricular policies and student opportunity to learn). If, however, expectations are incorporated into this model of school learning, it seems necessary to develop a link to another source of expectations for student learning, the school's social context.

We use the term social context to descibe the socioeconomic level of the home environment in which students live. This includes both the home and the community. The most commonly used measures of SES are mother's level of education and the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch. The Coleman report's conclusion that "schools don't make a difference" was based upon the finding that student SES, not school related variables, explained the greatest portion of variance in student achievement scores across classrooms and schools. Thus, the school's social context, not the school itself, came to be viewed by many policy makers as the focal point for interventions designed to improve learning outcomes.

The effective schools studies find, to the contrary, that there are schools serving the urban poor in which students achieve beyond what would be expected given their socioeconomic status. As noted above, the higher than expected achievement in these schools serving the poor has been associated with high expectations on the part of staff and students -- expectations that would typically be associated with schools located in high SES communities. Although there is a body of research that examines the social context of schooling,

relatively little of this research has been brought to bear on the effective schools findings. We believe that the concept of expectations as embodied in the teacher and school effects research provides a useful link between the Carroll's model of school learning and the social context of schooling. In Figure 2 we depict the hypothesized relationship between school social context, school effectiveness factors, student conditions, and learning outcomes.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In this adaptation of Carroll's model, school social context is viewed as a set of environmental conditions within which the students and the school staff operate. The arrows are drawn from "social context" to "effectiveness factors" to illustrate the hypothesized influence of the social context upon the policies and practices of the school staff.

The relationship between social context and student conditions is similarly depicted in Figure 2. That is, social context is represented as having an effect on individual learner conditions. These include those conceptualized by Carroll as well as those that describe the self-expectations of students. We hypothesize that the effects of social context on student behavior are largely explained by the climate of expectations maintained in higher SES homes and the schools that serve this clientele. This is consistent with findings from both the early (Averch et al., 1974; Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks, 1972; Summers & Wolfe, 1977) and later (Brookover et al.,

1975, 1978; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie et al., 1985; Venezky & Winfield, 1980) research on school effects.

Figure 2 shows an interactive relationship between "effectiveness factors" and "student conditions". This suggests that the student related factors are influenced by the policies and practices of the school and, at the same time, affect how the school staff behave. This description represents an adaptation of our earlier model of "academic press" (see Figure 1).

Finally, this model of social context and school effects portrays a direct relationship between "student conditions" and learning outcomes. Thus, this model hypothesizes that the impact of social context on learning outcomes occurrs through: 1) its influence on the manner in which the school organizes curriculum and instruction and communicates expectations for achievement; 2) its influence on individual student learning conditions. In the following section of this paper we discuss ways in which this model may further our understanding of school context effects on the operation of effective schools.

Social Context and School Effects

We organize our substantive discussion of social context effects on school effects around the following question: How does the social context shape the operation of instructionally effective schools in terms of policies and practices for promoting student learning? The discussion focuses primarily upon the "social context" and "effectiveness factors" boxes within the framework shown in Figure 2.

In the first part of this paper we noted that there is a broad and deep tradition of research on the social context of schooling.

Studies of school social contexts have analyzed many relationships between schooling and a variety of contextual variables. One branch of this research base has examined the relationship between student SES and elements of school and classroom organization. Recently several studies have been conducted that link student SES, the organization of curriculum and instruction, and measures of student achievement (see Andrews, Soder & Jacoby, 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1986; Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Miller, 1987; Rowan & Denk, 1984; Teddlie et al., 1985). These studies provide an interesting, though limited, supplement to the traditional studies of school social context. They suggest that high SES and low SES effective schools are characterized by different patterns of curricular breadth, allocations of time for learning, school mission, patterns of principal instructional leadership, opportunities for student recognitions, expectations for student achievement, and home-school relations. In this section we draw upon these studies as well as earlier studies of school social context in discussing the relationships between social contexts and the operation of effective schools.

Social context effects on schooling. Both empirical and theoretical explorations of social context effects on schooling suggest an isomorphic relationship between schools and their environment. Empirical studies have found social context effects on a variety of school related variables including: school goals (Davis & Stackhouse, 1977; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hills, 1961), staff expectations (Brookover et al., 1975, 1978; McDill et al., 1969), patterns of principal instructional leadership (Andrews et al., 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Rowan & Denk, 1984), instructional behaviors of teachers (Brophy & Good, 1970, 1986; Peterson, 1978; Rosenthal,

1968), parent attitudes and involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Heath, 1982; McDill et al., 1969; Wayson, 1966), and curricular content (California, 1984; Garet & DeLany, 1987; McDill et al., 1969). These findings are consistent with the position of organization theorists who suggest that organizations in general, and schools in particular adapt their internal operations to incorporate the value preferences and expectations extant in their social environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Thompson, 1967; Thompson & McEwen, 1958; Weick, 1976).

In developing the our model in part one, we noted the crucial role played by expectations in shaping nature of the school program as well as the student's self-expectations, beliefs, and behavior vis a vis learning in school. We alluded above to research that finds important environmental effects on the organization and operation of schools. In part, this influence flows from the expectations parents hold for their children.

Parents from different social backgrounds have different expectations for their student success in school. These expectations are transmitted not only to their children, but also to school staff. Parents from low socioeconomic communities often prefer an emphasis on social and vocational education, whereas parents from high SES communities generally prefer an emphasis on intellectual or academic goals (Hills, 1961; McDill et al., 1969). These differing goal preferences are incorporated by the school and reflected in the particular mix of activities and curricula offered to students.

In addition, many teachers base assessments of student ability on student socioeconomic background and adjust their expectations

accordingly (Brookover et al. 1978; Brophy & Good 1970; Hills, 1961). Thus, high SES schools tend to offer an academically oriented and rigorous curriculum specifically designed to promote cognitive learning. Students internalize these high expectations. Students from high SES communities come to believe that they will succeed, and therefore, to make curriculum choices based on that belief later in their academic careers (California State Department of Education, 1984).

Parent involvement in the school program has also been found to vary systematically with school social contexts. Schools in low SES communities tend to be subject to less pressure from and to experience less direct contact with parents (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Heath, 1982; Hills, 1961; McDill et al., 1969; Wayson, 1966). In one study that compared high SES and low SES schools, teachers in the low SES schools reported, "An almost complete absence of both (parental) interest in, and pressure on, the school" (Hills, 1961, p. 3). In contrast, parents in high SES schools were actively involved in the school program and exerted a considerable influence on its direction. The extent of contact between school staff and the community is important in that teacher attitudes and perceptions are shaped by the expectations and beliefs of the community (Hills, 1961; McDill et al., 1969). Higher rates of parent school interaction provide more opportunities for parents to communicate their perceptions and preferences to school staff.

Findings from a recent study by Chubb and Moe (1986) further point to the role of the environment in shaping school programs. The researchers examined the effectiveness of public and private schools, paying particular attention to the influence of their respective

environments. After analyzing the achievement of students in public and private schools, they concluded that the private schools were more effective than the public schools at educating comparable students. They find that parents in private school environments are more supportive and active in promoting the well being of the school. They attribute the achievement of students in private schools to the school environment.

> [The private schools] gain children whose family lives encourage education and parents who not only will facilitate school objectives, will be informed and supportive when they take an active role in school decision-making. Parents who may cause problems are precisely the ones most likely to drop out of the school's environment voluntarily (Chubb & Moe, 1986, p. 4).

In contrast, the public school environments were found to be considerably less supportive of the school's educational aims. Parental expectations concerning educational achievement tended to be more diffuse and conflicting.

> Many of their [public schools'] students come from families that put little or no emphasis on education; the students come to school with poor attitudes and orientations, and do little to facilitate the school's efforts.... Far from gaining sustenance from a supportive parental environment, the public school may often find itself dealing as best it can with conflict, disappointment, and apathy (1986, p.4).

This scenario seems most apparent in low SES public school environments. The combination of infrequent home-school contact and

low academic expectations make the typical low SES school a less effective environment for learning cognitive skills (Heath, 1982; McDill et al., 1969). The social context provides little normative pressure on staff in low SES schools to act in ways that promote student achievement. This pattern of school-community expectations and contact may explain, at least in part, differences in the organization of schools of varying socioeconomic status.

Social context effects on effective schools. Studies that have compared high and low SES effective schools may enable us to better understand the connections between the social context and schooling. One of the paradoxes of the effective schools research is the almost total absence of reference to the role of the effective school's environment in promoting student learning. It is paradoxical precisely because of the importance attributed to the environment in shaping the success of high SES schools. This paradox is compounded by the prescription offered by even the most credible reviewers of this literature that practitioners "should" include parent-school relations as a component of their effective schools program (see for example Purkey & Smith, 1983).

The general finding among the effective schools studies has been that effective low SES schools hold high expectations for students while maintaining rather weak linkages with their environments (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Rutter et al., 1979). To a large degree, the development of school goals, a common curriculum, and an instructional focus buffer the school from environmental uncertainty. Studies of effective schools which serve students from high SES families find that these schools have developed particularly strong connections with their environments (Estler, 1985;

Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Teddlie et al., 1985).

The work of Meyer and Rowan (1977) on educational organizations and their environments helps provide insight into this pattern. They have noted that strong interconnections typically exist between schools and their environments. The boundaries between schools and their communities tend to be permeable; schools are highly susceptible to the shifting preferences extant in the community. The permeability of the school's boundaries impedes the development of norms among staff and students that run counter to general environmental values.

This framework illuminates the different patterns of organization that is being found in high and low SES effective schools. Effective low SES schools seem to isolate themselves from environmental norms, which may often promote low expectations, conflict or failure with respect to the attainment of cognitively oriented school goals. Their orientation is primarily internal, focusing on the implementation of specific set of practices designed to promote student mastery of basic reading and math skills. These schools are characterized by elaborate systems of reward and recognition designed to build the academic self esteem of students, the belief that they can succeed (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Rutter et al., 1979).

Faced with the task of turning a school around, the principals in effective low SES schools appear more directive and forceful in setting high standards for students and teachers (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Rowan & Denk, 1984). They buffer their schools from the environment and attempt to create a learning climate that communicated high expectations and that rewards students for the desired behavior. The strong administrative leadership exhibited by principals in

effective low SES schools runs counter to traditional school norms (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Rutter et al., 1979; Venezky & Winfield, 1978). Thus, principals in effective low SES schools are often characterized as "mavericks".

In contrast, effective high SES schools are highly isomorphic in their orientation to their environment (Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Miller, 1987). This relationship is perhaps best illustrated in the behavior of the principal. Principals in effective high SES effective schools may be called instructional leaders, but the form of this leadership behavior differs markedly from that of their counterparts in effective low SES schools (Andrews et al., 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Miller, 1986). These principals tend to exert less direct control over the internal operations of the school. The high visibility of parents in and around the school represented a form of environmental control over internal processes. Thus, the their role involves maintaining a consensus over the school's direction, mediating the demands and expectations of the community, and smoothing relations between teachers and parents.

High SES schools exist in an environment of very high expectations. The effective schools seem to expend a relatively high proportion of energy into channelling these expectations into practices that promote student achievement. Parents, staff and students generally start out believing that students will succeed. Success then breeds success. Students are expected to learn; they believe they can learn, and that their efforts in school will make a difference. Thus, the expectations emanating from the social environment of the school influence the student both directly through the home and through the school.

Other recent studies that have investigated the relationship between school effectiveness variables and school social context support the hypothesis that the social context represents an important factor in the operation of effective schools. In their study of leadership succession, Rowan and Denk (1984) found SES-related differences in the effects of principal succession on student achievement. Principal succession had a larger effect on academic achievement in low SES schools than in high SES schools. In interpreting their findings, they note that lower SES schools are frequently under a specific mandate to improve basic skill achievement. They hypothesize that this gives the principal more leeway to institute change and control instruction than is the case in higher SES schools. Rowan and Denk further suggest that "parents at these (low SES) schools may be less active politically, with the result that change oriented leaders would face less restrictions on their activities" (1984, p. 21). This is consistent with the finding noted earlier that principals in effective low SES schools are more directive, task oriented, and involved in instructional control and development than those in the high SES schools and less influenced by parental pressures.

Estler (1985) also discovered SES related differences in school organization variables in a study of school goals and student achievement. She found that the academic achievement of low SES black students was positively related to staff and parent goal congruity, whereas an inverse relationship was found in schools that serve white and Asian children. Estler hypothesizes that this finding is related to the entry level skills that students bring to school. The stronger academic background of middle and upper income students better

prepares them to deal with goal diversity. Students in low income communities respond more productively to a well focused school mission.

Teddlie and his colleagues (1984) examined the relationship between a variety of school effectiveness factors and student achievement in 76 elementary schools of varying socioeconomic composition. They found that effectiveness in high SES schools was strongly associated with high degrees of teacher parent contact and with teacher perceptions that parents were concerned with quality education. In these schools, teachers held high present and future academic expectations than their peers in less effective high SES schools. In the low SES schools, instructional effectiveness was associated with high present expectations for student achievement, an emphasis on teaching basic reading and math skills, and frequent classroom visits by principals.

Thus it appears that instructionally effective schools are subject to the influence of their social context and make successful adaptations to their particular environments. Logically, the substantive responses that they make to the children and communities they serve differ in concrete, observable ways.

Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to build upon a conceptual model of school learning, drawing from the research on teacher and school effects. The larger purpose of the paper was to link the research on efefctive schools to a larger body of resarch on the social context of schooling. Specifically, we were interested in examining the links between school social context and the operation of schools that are

instructionally effective.

The presents a paradox in terms of the relationship between schools and their communities. There are implications of both a political and technical nature which ultimately address the role of community involvement in school improvement. The research suggests that schools can become effective without parent involvement, yet parent involvement and expectations seem to have potentially powerful effects on student learning. The fact that effective schools are, by definition, "mavericks" or "outliers" implies that few low SES schools provide the high expectations necessary for high achievement in the absence of external pressure, an idiosyncratic leader, or the chance distribution of dedicated, competent, collegial faculty. A logical inference is that schools should focus some effort on changing the expectations of parents in low SES communities to reflect a more academic orientation. This point of view has been espoused by many effective schools researchers including Edmonds, Lezotte, Purkey, and Smith. They suggest that although parent involvement in low SES schools by itself may not promote student achievement, given the proper orientation, it may represent an important supporting factor for promoting long-term school improvement. An alternative hypothesis is that it is advantageous for low SES schools to buffer their internal operations from their social environment, at least until they have achieved some degree of stable improvement.

Future research on school effectiveness must begin to unravel the interactions among various effectiveness factors, and explicate their linkages with the social context and student conditions. What combinations of factors appear to enhance instructional effectiveness under different sets of conditions? In particular, we recommend

investigations that examine both the source of expectations and the manner in which schools translate and communicate expectations to students. Future research should utilize current models of instructional leadership (e.g., Bossert et al., 1982; Murphy et al., 1983) to investigate how principal leadership varies with the school context. In particular, we suggest that researchers examine the principal's role in linking the school and community. A major advance in research on instructional leadership will occur when we can describe the relationship between organizational context and effective instructional leadership behavior. We recommend that researchers interested in this area look to contingency theories of organizational leadership for guidance in conceptualizing the dynamics of this interation.

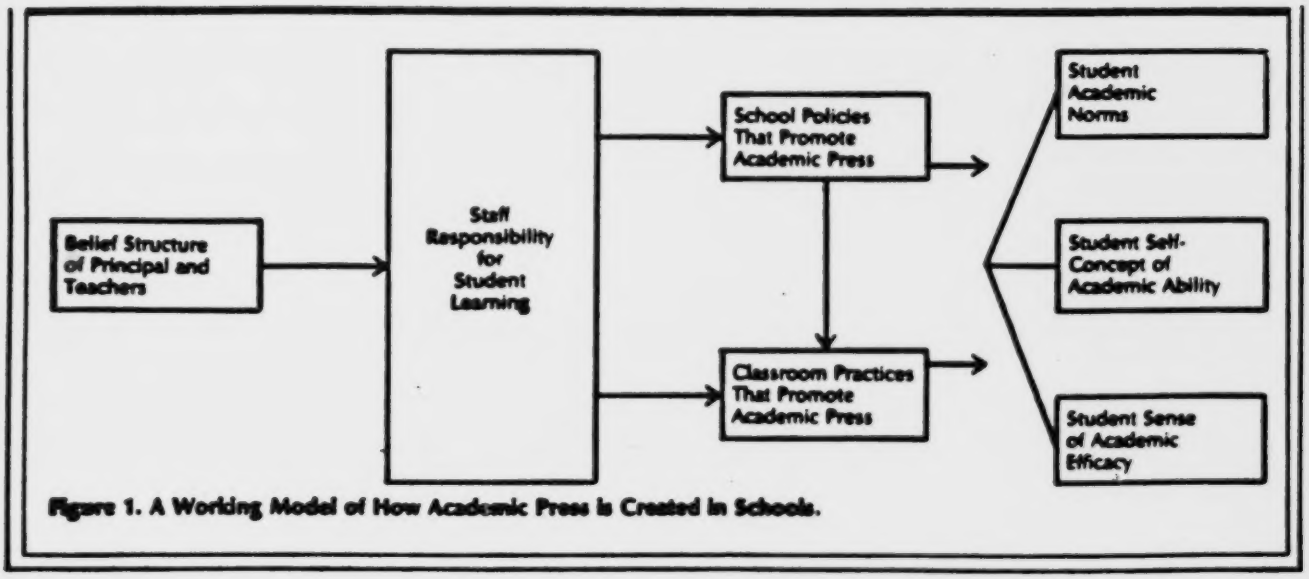
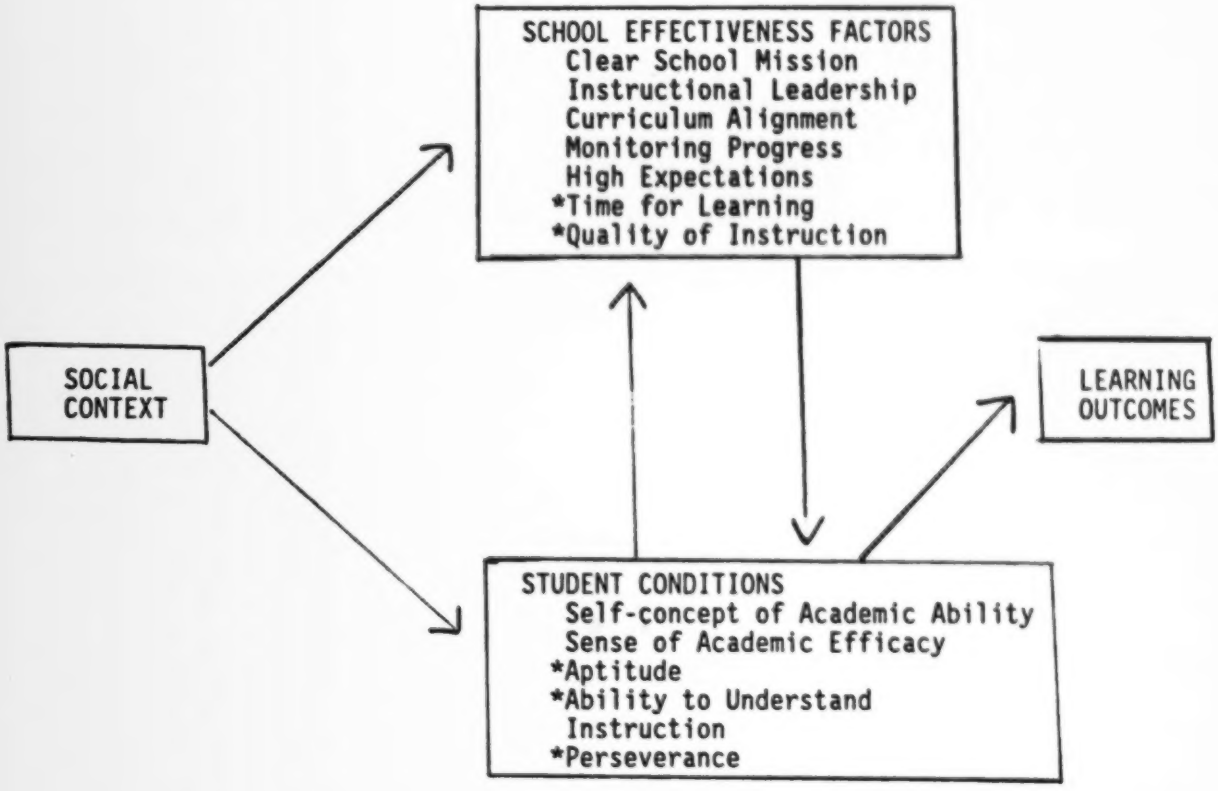

Belief Structure of Principal and Teachers
Staff Responsibility for Student Learning
School Policies That Promote Academic Press
Classroom Practices That Promote Academic Press
Student Academic Norms
Student Self-Concept of Academic Ability
Student Sense of Academic Efficacy

Figure 1. A Working Model of How Academic Press is Created in Schools.

Figure 2
A Model of the Relationship Between
School Social Context and School Learning



* The asterisked variables are derived from Carroll's (1963) model of school learning.

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